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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PINS](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [ML](#)
SUBJECT: TUAREGS CAPTURE THIRD KIDNAPPING SUSPECT IN
NORTHERN MALI

REF: A. BAMAKO 00135
[1](#)B. BAMAKO 00182

Classified By: Political Officer Aaron Sampson, Embassy Bamako,
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1.(S/NF) Summary: Kidal Tuaregs led by Merzouk ag Acherif captured Inteweka ag Ahmayed (aka Ousmane) on March 23 in the northern Mali border town of In-Khalil. Reportedly based in the southern Algerian town of Tamanrasset, Inteweka was one of three Malian Tuaregs linked to the January 22 kidnappings of four European tourists. The arrest operation targeted Inteweka and renowned AQIM facilitator Asultan ould Badi. Tuareg contacts reported that Merzouk missed capturing ould Badi by minutes. The arrest came days after another operation, also led by Merzouk, nabbed two other kidnapping suspects near the town of Gao. In early March Merzouk and another Kidal Taghat Melet Tuareg leader, Abdousalam ag Assalat, tipped the Embassy off to their plans to arrest individuals suspected of kidnapping westerners and turning them over to AQIM (Ref. A). It now appears that Merzouk and ag Assalat's citizens' arrest scheme has the tacit endorsement of other senior Kidal Tuareg leaders united by (1) indignation over the apparent involvement of Malian Tuaregs in the European and Canadian kidnappings, and (2) concern that a handful of Tuareg AQIM collaborators will adversely impact the image and position of Mali's greater Tuareg community. End Summary.

Another Kidnapping Arrest

2.(S/NF) A group of Taghat Melet Tuaregs led by Merzouk ag Acherif captured Inteweka ag Ahmayed (aka Ousmane), also a Taghat Melet, in the northern Malian border town of In-Khalil on March 23. Tuareg contacts told the Embassy that Inteweka would be handed over to Malian authorities on March 24. The operation, which was meticulously planned by Merzouk and others, was apparently designed to capture both Inteweka and Asultan ould Badi. Ould Badi, however, reportedly left the targeted residence in In-Khalil just minutes before the operation began.

3.(S/NF) Inteweka is the third kidnapping suspect captured by local Tuaregs in the space of one week (Ref. B). The two arrest raids - one east of Gao and this one in In-Khalil - have netted what appear to be two individuals of high interest: Inteweka and Sidamar ag Ilaste. They have also missed two individuals of note: ould Badi, and Mahama ag Assarid who allegedly worked with Inteweka to pull off the European kidnappings. It is unclear whether there are any plans to try to capture ould Badi or ag Assarid again, given that both presumably are now well aware that elements of Kidal's Tuareg hierarchy are actively hunting them down.

Comment: Tuaregs Strike Back

4.(S/NF) We originally believed the sting operations targeting kidnapping suspects were hatched by a small group of Taghat Melet Tuaregs from Kidal led by Merzouk and ag Assalat. It now appears that Merzouk has a much larger coalition of support. Concerns about potential ramifications for Mali's greater Tuareg community should Tuareg traffickers be implicated in the kidnapping of westerners have reportedly united leaders of several key Tuareg communities in northern Mali - including the ruling Ifoghas group from Kidal - to take matters into their own hands. Our understanding is that Ifoghas and other Tuareg groups from Kidal have given Merzouk the green light to hunt down suspected kidnapping suspects, provided the heavy lifting remains a Taghat Melet, as opposed to an Ifoghas, affair.

5.(S/NF) Tuaregs are clearly conflicted on the efficacy of turning captured kidnapping suspects over to the Malian authorities. On one hand, Tuaregs are acting in their own interests to protect their image and reputation as opponents of AQIM and preserve whatever is left of the security that is essential for development in Kidal. On the other, Tuaregs involved in the arrest operations are concerned that these efforts will not only be for naught but could incur further, much more personal dangers. When relaying details of Inteweka's arrest on March 23, Tuaregs once again questioned the long-term impact of such arrests, stating that Mali would simply hold the individuals for a requisite amount of time before releasing them or allowing them to "escape". There is some merit to this observation. However, the capture of individuals linked to the Canadian and European kidnappings may force other traffickers in northern Mali looking to turn a quick buck to think twice before capturing more hostages.

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